

# Will you look at my CV, or my pictures on Facebook?

## How using social networking sites for recruitment could land applicants, employees and employers in big trouble

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### Background

The use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has grown rapidly.



800 Million Users



135 Million Users



300 Million Users

Employers have started using SNS during pre-employment searches, despite lack of policy and guidance about how it should be used.

#### Implications are:

- inconsistent and questionable use of SNS by employers
- employers exposed to legal challenges.

### Survey

- Online data collection (February – March 2011)
- Nationally representative sample of people of working age in the UK & Ireland (n=1,212); (representative of region of residence, gender, age, ethnic origin, educational level, employment status, and job level).
- 16PF personality questionnaire and a variety of other questions

#### Social networking questions concerned:

- the extent of online use
- use of specific technology
- reasons for use
- and attitudes towards privacy.

### Results

#### Demographics

- 54% of those surveyed use SNS (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn)
- females spend significantly more time using SNS than males.

#### Personality Traits: people who spend more time using SNS were:

- more socially participative
- more receptive and open-minded
- likely to take a more liberal approach to externally imposed rules
- less emotionally stable.

#### Online privacy

- 43% were slightly concerned/not concerned at all about privacy of their information; 57% were at least moderately concerned.

#### Those showing less concern for their online privacy are:

- more spontaneous
- more likely to daydream rather than focus on practical details
- less bound by rules
- less likely to plan ahead, more likely to leave things to chance.
- more tolerant of others
- less self-critical
- more willing to disclose information about themselves
- more logical in their decision-making

#### Also

- (63%) stated that they wouldn't change their character online
- of those who use SNS, only 9% believed that their online presence had ever compromised their professional reputation.

#### Recruitment

We asked "How likely would you be to look at a potential employee's online presence prior to interviewing them?"

- Responses showed: 45% not likely, 29% somewhat likely, 18% likely, 9% very likely.

"How comfortable would you feel if someone interviewing you searched your presence on social networking pages?"

- Responses showed: 27% not comfortable, 26% somewhat comfortable, 28% comfortable, 19% very comfortable.

11% of people stated that they would be 'likely' or 'very likely' to look at an interviewee's social networking information, but would NOT be comfortable with an interviewer looking at their own social networking information.

### Discussion and recommendations

With SNS around, you don't just have to consider your CV, interview skills, presentation skills, and aptitude for psychometric tests, you also need to think about that drunken photograph or snide comment that you put up on Facebook six months ago. If you are active on SNS, then prospective employers might see more about you than you'd like to share in your CV.

It appears that those likely to use SNS are exactly the kind of people who need to hear some words of caution. They are more impulsive, less cautious, more sharing and less emotionally stable.

#### We advise employees:

- Be aware of the image your SNS use portrays of you
- LinkedIn: use LinkedIn wisely – treat it like a professional networking event. Behave politely. Don't lie. Don't start stupid arguments. Don't criticise others impolitely
- Facebook: lock down your privacy settings completely! Or if you don't, make sure any level of information supports the social media image that you are trying to create
- Twitter: it's completely public; only share things that support the reputation that you are trying to create.

#### Risks to employers:

- Be aware of risks for bias, discrimination and therefore lawsuits!
- There is a risk of misinterpretation of SNS information (e.g. reading innocent information as inappropriate)
- Be aware also of potential discrimination (for example racist, sexist, anti-religious biases might surface in the recruiter, particularly as the SNS search may be done in private and not be documented, which is a prime time for prejudice to occur)
- Is there any evidence to suggest that an SNS search will be in the slightest bit relevant to the job you're recruiting? If not, why do it?

However, as many employers will use SNS searches, these are our pragmatic suggestions:

#### We advise employers:

The best advice has to be that employers should not use Facebook or Twitter for pre-selection searches, because of all the potential bias and subjectivity which an unsuccessful applicant might allege led the employer to reject them.

- Do you really need to screen candidates using SNS? What does Facebook or another social site add to your selection process? How are you going to test what you've found for any misinterpretation or misunderstanding?
- Have a clear policy in place and take formal legal advice on it, as employers can fall foul of employment and data protection laws. Staff involved in recruiting should be prohibited from adding an applicant as a "friend" to investigate their background; this will minimise the risk of a breach of data protection legislation, and the potential for bias in selection
- Keep records of how you found the candidates and anything that supports that your hiring decisions were fair and based upon consistent, objective and job-relevant searches. In the face of a legal claim how would you prove that you did not discriminate on the basis of an SNS search? You would need to be sure that you have not been influenced in a discriminatory way by what you found and that your documents support your decisions
- Consider using SNS only after initial interviews and even then only as background checks; this may minimise claims that hiring decisions were influenced by any factors discovered in the search.

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